

The frat boy notices that I am still hanging around,
so he scowls and confers with his bro,
but by now the young women are all inside
the Gamma Phi Beta house anyway,
safe from whatever it is that threatens them.
Anacharsis Cloots was my kind of guy,
silly but dangerous;
no wonder they cut off his head.

A SYLLABUS OF ERRORS

A four-year-old, no relative though one of my acquaintance,
yet barely, confides that he "wishes women had penises"
and, when asked why, replies "so I can look at them"
and refuses to or, more strictly, does not elaborate,

four-year-olds having scant powers of elaboration,
thus rendering the matter of refusal immaterial
and leaving me to fill a silence that is awkward,
if only for one of us, and to think of Socrates,

said to have computed that the life of the philosopher
is 729 times more pleasurable than that of the tyrant,
even though it has never been supposed that either of them,
the one in the fullness of his joy

and the other in the poverty of his,
derived either a jot or tittle of gratification more or
less from the prospect of women having penises
which they, in turn, could look at,

and I think as well of humanistic psychologist Abraham
Maslow
who observed that "love at its best
is also a kind of silly thing,"
and of Pius IX, who in 1864 published his Syllabus of
Errors.

Whose life could not bear that title?

Grown men in the throes of orgasm see themselves
wielding a flaming sword as armies clash on a sunny hillside
and a choir bellows the "Hallelujah Chorus,"

even though in reality the deed itself is often better
likened

to the asthmatic wheeze of a bicycle horn.
I have heard these same men say, "I like a woman wif a big
butt!"

and then again, less for emphasis than for
self-aggrandizement

and the sheer pleasure of hearing their own voices,
"I like a woman wif a big ol' butt!" though it's not the same
as wishing women to have penises so that one may look at them,
for it affords not the same opportunity to speculate
on the psychosexuality of children actual and otherwise,
that is, resident in our biologically mature selves,
and therefore I find myself grateful for both status quos,
the vanilla status quo of the present moment
and the more venerable status quo ante,
represented in this particular
by the exquisitely-sculpted genitals of women,
contemporary as well as historical,
and also for the silliness of the four-year-old;
by any account an oracle yet also a fool and unaware,
though no one else is, of both his oracular and foolish
natures
and therefore doubtless the better for it.

THE POTATO MASH (MORE INDEFINITE AND MORE SOLUBLE)

If Debussy had written the score to the story of my
adolescence,
he would have called it, after the name of the poem
by his good friend Mallarmé, L'Après-Midi d'un Dope.
So many adventures! All of them stupid.
For a while I worked for a rock band:
I handled the bookings, the equipment, and the snacks.
The band leader played the French horn,
which is all he knew how to play;
it was the only rock and roll French horn in the business.

And the bassist, who had never played at all,
just hit whatever notes he felt like hitting,
saying it didn't make any difference
because nobody ever paid any attention to the bass line
anyway.

Then there were the two blind brothers,
a drummer and a guitarist,
good musicians who drank bourbon and ate doughnuts
during the shows, always with disastrous results,
though the band was horrible to begin with.

We never accomplished our goal of meeting pliant women,
and everywhere we went,
the drunken fishermen we played for were mad at us
because our music had not brought out any women for them.
Instead we played songs like "The Mashed Potatoes,"